

## In brief

## Flats plans to be discussed

**BILLERICAY:** Councillors met last night, Tuesday, to decide on controversial plans to add a further 24 flats to an existing block of 19 homes at Walman House, St Edith's Court. The Town Council opposed the plans, claiming the additional units would be an eyesore.

## New unit and A&amp;E at hospital

**DISTRICT:** To coincide with the five year anniversary of Basildon Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, a new endoscopy unit will open at the hospital later this year, and there are further plans to upgrade and expand the accident and emergency department. Since April 2004 there has been a big reduction in waiting times and infection rates and major improvements for patients and visitors.

## Charity checks baby monitors

**BILLERICAY:** Round tablers made a special visit to Basildon University Hospital to see how baby dopplers they purchased for the maternity unit are being used.

## Expert gives growing tips

GARDENERS gearing up for this year's Billericay in Bloom competition can pick up a few tips from an expert.

Ian Bull, of RHS Gardens Hyde Hall, will be giving an illustrated talk entitled *Herbaceous Borders Through the Seasons* at the Reading Rooms, in Billericay on Thursday May 7.

The free talk starts at 7.30pm.

Billericay in Bloom 2009 was officially launched on Friday when members of the working party visited the home of Anne Reid, in Kelvedon Road, winner of last year's small back garden section and the best in show title.

Entries can be submitted to the town council and the winners will be announced this summer.



**GREEN FINGERS:** (l-r) Billericay in Bloom working party John Buchanan, Moira Moore, Cllr Peter Bowditch, Pam Went and Tina Arnold with 2008 winner Anne Reid, front.  
Photo by Paul Robins bg pr 170409 01 02

## Police and fire service to investigate suspicious blaze at Dale Farm

## Travellers in arson fear

## David Arnold

david.arnold@gazettenews.co.uk

A SUSPICIOUS fire on the outskirts of the country's largest illegal traveller site has prompted a joint police and fire investigation.

The blaze ripped through a bungalow and an outbuilding in Oak Lane, at the heart of the Dale Farm gipsy site in the village of Crays

Hill on Saturday night.

And it has rocked the traveller community who fear they could have been targeted by arsonists.

In the past neighbours have threatened to blow up the camp after travellers lined the entrance to the site with gas bottles and erected towers making the settled community feel intimidated.

Although the blaze is being

treated as suspicious, the nature has yet to be ascertained.

Traveller spokesman Grattan Puxon was shocked by the news, he said: "This sort of thing does make you wonder if it had been racially motivated."

"If an investigation has been launched then it seems as though there is a possibility the area has been targeted."

Three fire crews were called to the incident just before 10.30pm on Saturday.

The flames took hold of the home, which is just metres from the A127, and a derelict outbuilding 10 metres away was also badly burnt.

Divisional officer Dave Beale said: "When we arrived one building was 100 per cent well alight.

"We began using three hose reel

jets and one main jet and managed to extinguish the fire at just after midnight.

"As yet, the cause of the fire is unknown, but the fire and police service are set to carry out an investigation."

A police spokesman also confirmed that an investigation into the suspicious fire had been launched.